COURAGE

Texts: Deuteronomy 31:1-8; Joshua 1:5-9

Key verse: “Only be thou strong and very courageous…” (Joshua 1:7a)

We are living in a dearth of courage. As you study the etymology of the word, you will discover the root of the word is “heart.” When we say “courage” we are basically referring to one who acts with a brave heart or has the heart to rise above his or her circumstances and then to do the brave and right thing that is called for or needed. My youth was filled with stories of brave men whom we were taught to emulate. Men such as Nathan Hale, who, just before he bravely died for his country during the Revolutionary War said, ““I only regret that I have but one life to give for my country.” I have often thought of Alfred Lord Tennyson’s poem, “The Charge of the Light Brigade” where we find these words: “Theirs not to reason why, Theirs but to do and die….”

A consensus among writers and even warriors is that a person of courage is not a person who never knows fear, but rather a person who conquers fear. Emerson said, “A hero is no braver than an ordinary man, but he is brave five minutes longer.” Mark Twain said, “Courage is resistance to fear, mastery of fear - not absence of fear.” Sir Winston Churchill said, “Success is not final, failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts.” Great things go unaccomplished because greatness goes hand-in-hand with courage. Samuel Johnson said, “Courage is the greatest of all virtues, because if you haven't courage, you may not have an opportunity to use any of the others.” Let’s look to the Bible and see what conclusions we may come to about this too oft elusive virtue.

1. COURAGE IS REFUSING TO RUN AWAY.

Exodus 14:13: “And Moses said unto the people, Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will shew to you to day: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen to day, ye shall see them again no more for ever.” Flight or fight is the human response to fear. The strength to hold ground in the face of terror is not pleasant, but it can definitely change the outcome. William Tyndale’s so-called crime was translating the Bible into English. He would not recant; he would not apologize. Tyndale did not run from the truth; he died for it! He was strangled to death while tied at the stake, and then his dead body was burned. His final words, spoken at the stake with a fervent zeal and a loud voice, were reported as "Lord! Open the King of England's eyes." Within 75 years, James,

the King of England authorized the printing of what is commonly known as the King James Version of the Bible.

2. COURAGE IS A DELIBERATE CHOICE.

Isaiah 12:2: "Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and not be afraid: for the LORD JEHOVAH is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation." A person doesn't accidentally become courageous. This was the attitude spoken of in Joshua 24:15: "And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the
LORD."

3. COURAGE IS CHOOSING THE FEAR OF GOD OVER THE FEAR OF MAN.

Jeremiah 1:8: "Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the LORD." Proverbs 14:26: "In the fear of the LORD is strong confidence: and his children shall have a place of refuge." Proverbs 29:25: "The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe." Proverbs 15:33: "The fear of the LORD is the instruction of wisdom; and before honour is humility."

4. COURAGE IS STANDING STRONG IN THE FACE OF WHAT APPEARS TO BE OVERWHELMING ODDS.

Deuteronomy 20:1: "When thou goest out to battle against thine enemies, and seest horses, and chariots, and a people more than thou, be not afraid of them: for the LORD thy God is with thee, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt."

II Chronicles 20:15: "And he said, Hearken ye, all Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem, and thou king Jehoshaphat, Thus saith the LORD unto you, Be not afraid nor dismayed by reason of this great multitude; for the battle is not yours, but God's."

II Kings 6:16, 17: "And he answered, Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them. And Elisha prayed, and said, LORD, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the LORD opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain *was* full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha."

5. COURAGE IS OFTEN BORROWED UNTIL WE OWN IT.

II Samuel 10:11, 12: "And he said, If the Syrians be too strong for me, then thou shalt help me: but if the children of Ammon be too strong for thee, then I will come and help thee. Be of good courage, and let us play the men for our people, and for the cities of our God: and the LORD do that which seemeth him good."

6. COURAGE ELIMINATES PREOCCUPATION WITH WHAT WE MAY LOSE BY BEING COURAGEOUS.

Deuteronomy 20:1-7. The loss of comfort, the loss of revenue or the loss of relationships cannot be a determining factor if courage is to surface. "You cannot swim for new horizons until you have courage to lose sight of the shore" (William Faulkner). "A ship is safe in harbor, but that's not what ships are for" (John A. Shedd).

7. COURAGE IS CONTAGIOUS.

Deuteronomy 20:8: "And the officers shall speak further unto the people, and they shall say, What man is there that is fearful and fainthearted? let him go and return unto his house, lest his brethren's heart faint as well as his heart." Acts 4:13 and Acts 4:31 illustrate that when we keep company with Jesus and are filled with the Holy Spirit, we rise above all timidity and cowardice to do great things for God and humanity.

"Courage is contagious. When a brave man takes a stand, the spines of others are often stiffened" (Billy Graham). "A team is where a boy can prove his courage on his own. A gang is here a coward goes to hide" (Mickey Mantle). "Untutored courage is useless in the face of educated bullets" (George S. Patton).

8. COURAGE MUST STAND ALONE AT TIMES.

II Timothy 4:16, 17: "At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge. Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion."

"There is a stubbornness about me that never can bear to be frightened at the will of others. My courage always rises at every attempt to intimidate me" (Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*). "Have the courage to have your wisdom

regarded as stupidity. Be fools for Christ. And have the courage to suffer the contempt of the sophisticated world" (Antonin Scalia).

9. COURAGE IS BOLSTERED BY A STRONG DESIRE TO DO RIGHT.

Proverbs 28:1: "The wicked flee when no man pursueth: but the righteous are bold as a lion." William Lyon Phelps tells my favorite story from World War I, which illustrates a desire to do right that rises above the desire to stay alive. We have never needed more courageous Christians than at this present hour!

-Pastor Pope-